(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when, necessary legislative masure would be brought before Parliament?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRIMANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. The question of bringing in a legislation to provide for the establishment of Gram Nyayalayas for the purposes of access to justice, both civil and criminal; to citizens at the grassroots level and ensuring them an opportunity for securing justice is being studied by the Government in the Ministry of Law and Justice. The modalities are being worked out. As the proposal involves deep study and careful consideration and wide range consultations are also required before the proposal is finalized, it would be difficult to lay down any rigid time-frame in this regard.

Women leaders in Panchayats

675. PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that there are above ten lakh women leaders in Panchayats in the country;

(b) if so, whether Government are taking any steps to enable women to take active role in the matter relating to their village and taluk; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a)As per available information as on 01.04.2005, there were approximately 8,90,605 number of women representatives, at different levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the country. This is in addition to the Women elected to the urban local bodies, which would make the overall figure approximately ten lakh.

(b) and (c) Yes Sir. The Government supports capacity building training programmes for elected women representatives of panchayats so that they can effectively carry out their duties and responsibilities as envisaged in the Constitution, to take an active role in the matters relating to their village and taluk.

In order to evolve the National Consensus on the measure to be taken to strengthen Panchayati Raj, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened

Seven Round Tables of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj between July, 2004 and December, 2004. At the Round Table around 150 points for action covering 18 dimensions of Panchayati Raj were formulated by Consensus. *Inter-alia,* these include points of action pertaining to both the Centre and the States that concern the active participation of women in PRIs and Gram Sabhas. These might be summarized as below:—

(i) The provision of women Component Plans in the budgets of the PRIs;

(ii) Harmonize linkages with Self help Groups (SHGs);

(iii) Adequate training and capacity building;

(iv) Mahila Sabhas (or equivalent) to facilitate women's concerns and priorities being raised in meetings of Gram Sabhas and Ward Sabhas (or equivalent sub-Gram Sabha forums);

(v) Separate quorum for women's participation in Gram Sabhas and sub-Gram Sabha forums.

The full text of the conclusions relating to Women arrived at in the Round Table at Raipur is enclosed as statement.

Statement

Third Round Table of Ministers in-charge of Panchayati Raj-Raipur, 23-24 September 2004

Ministers in-charge of Panchayati Raj, and their representatives, bearing in mind the spirit of cooperative federalism which must inform the effective implementation of Panchayati Raj as set out in Part IX of the Constitution of India and related provisions, agreed to recommend to their respective Governments, for joint acceptance by the Centre and the States, the following points of action:

II. Reservations for Women

(i) It is clear that women have been able to enlarge their representation beyond the minimum $33V^{1}/_{3}\%$ prescribed by the Constitution. In Karnataka, 45% of the elected offices are occupied by women and in Uttar Pradesn, 54% of the Zilla Panchayats Presidents are women. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, 36% seats of chairpersons of Gram Panchayats are occupied by women.

(ii) In promoting larger social objectives through PRIs, States may be sensitized to issues of gender empowerment so that the unintended consequences of such policies is not to diminish the role of women in Panchayati Raj.

(iii) The Constitution does provide for the rotation of seats reserved for women but does not prescribe the number of terms for which seats may be reserved before rotation. Seats may be reserved for one term or two terms or more depending upon the provisions made by the State Legislature in the State law. There are different practices being adopted in the different States and there are different practices under contemplation in several States. This being so, the option to reserve seats for more than one-term is open but it is for the State legislature to decide the number of terms for which seats will remain reserved.

(iv) The empowerment of women through reservations in the panchayats is a necessary first step but needs to be reinforced by a number of other measures such as:

(a) the provision of Women Component Plans in the budgets of the PRIs;

(b) linkages with Self Help Groups (SHGs);

(c) adequate training and capacity building;

(d) encouragement to political parties to put up women candidates;

(e) the opportunity to women to serve a full term when they are elected to posts in the PR system;

(f) Manila Sabhas (or equivalent) to facilitate women's concerns and priorities being raised in meetings of Gram Sabhas and Ward Sabhas (or equivalent sub-Gram Sabha forums);

(g) separate quorum for women's participation in Gram Sabhas and sub-Gram Sabha forums.

Reservations to the post of chairperson in the PR system has been challenged in the courts of law, calling for an appropriate defence of the provisions in the court and jurisprudential clarifications of the issues involved.